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UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

University Extension Division

EDWIN A. START, Director

BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL AND LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH

Dr. Herman A. Brauer, in charge

The University of Washington in its Extension Division has recently established a Bureau of Municipal and Legislative Research. The first work of this bureau is to examine the material in the university library on questions of government, public administration and comparative legislation, and to assist in keeping the material on these subjects relatively complete with specialized, up-to-date information to be collected from all over the world.

There is no better place for such a bureau than the state university, where it has close at hand not only the best library facilities in the state, but what is even more important, where it has the advantage of counsel and advice from highly trained experts in the various departments of the university, such as law, political science, social science, economics, forestry, mining, engineering, and all the thirty-four different departments of the university now existing.

The work is under the direction of the Extension Division because the information collected is to be made available not only for training and research in the departments of the university, but to every community in the state. For example, the Improvement Clubs now formed in many communities of this state can get from this bureau standard articles on all sides of any question in which such clubs may be interested. Perhaps the persons who can take most direct advantage of the work of this bureau will be our state legislators and our public officials in both state and city government. The help that can be rendered to legislators at this session will be to a certain extent limited owing to the late appointment of the expert in charge, but the purpose of this circular is to offer such service as we may be able to render at this time.

No New Departure

In establishing this Bureau of Municipal and Legislative Research, the university is following the lead of other up-to-date institutions in older states, notably Wisconsin. Such bureaus can no longer be regarded as new or untried institutions. They have long since passed the stage of experiment, and are now established facts in some twenty of

our own states, to say nothing of foreign countries where similar functions have been performed, in part at least, for a great many years. In view of the proved usefulness of these information bureaus, the important service they have rendered and the urgent need they have filled, it is quite certain that the near future will see them established not only in all the American states, but in every progressive country throughout the world. At the present moment a strong movement is under way for the establishment of a Congressional Reference Bureau in our National Capital for the use of Congress and the federal executive and administrative departments.

A Wide Field of Service

The field of service for these legislative and municipal information bureaus is very large. With our rapidly growing population and the progressive development of our political and social institutions, the problems of good government—state, local and municipal—have inevitably become more complicated and more difficult than ever before. Our legislators, our executive and administrative officials, our mayors, councillors and departmental heads, in fact all our public men from the governor down, are almost

daily confronted with questions and problems requiring for their wise solution the use of elaborate data and highly specialized knowledge on a variety of subjects.

Overwhelmed With Bills

Just glance over the list of bills introduced in our state legislatures in a single session. Merely to enumerate the titles of these bills would require a whole pamphlet by itself. More than a thousand bills may be introduced in a single session, dealing with every conceivable subject of legislation and calling for comprehensive, comparative data or expert scientific knowledge in different fields. Our sixty-first Congress, for example, passed on no less than 44,000 bills. Now what legislator, however competent or expert he may be in his own special work, can possibly inform himself in the busy rush of a legislative session on all the matters involved in the hundreds of bills on which he is required to vote, so that he may be in a position to act intelligently and wisely on the various measures and projects before him?

Municipal Problems

Similar considerations apply in the sphere of municipal government. Here the field of service is equally wide, and possibly even

more urgent. With the enormous concentration of population in cities and the vast expenditure of money which it involves, many new and difficult problems have arisen. There are questions of health and sanitation, of traffic and transportation, of street pavement, street cleaning, water supply, garbage and sewage disposal, milk and food inspection, public works, public utilities, and public service rates; questions of municipal organization and administration, municipal employment, city planning, parks and playgrounds, civic centers, art commissions, schools, charities and corrections, accounting methods, commission government and the hundred and one other subjects of municipal interest which now exist or from time to time may arise. Now what busy public official or department head, even the most conscientious and most diligent, can possibly procure for himself the up-to-date information on all these subjects which he requires to consult for the faithful and most efficient discharge of his duties?

A Clearing House for Ideas

Now these are some of the functions of this Legislative and Municipal Information Bureau. It aims to be a clearing house for municipal and legislative experiments and ex-

perience all over the world, so that our public men may be placed in a position to profit both by the wisdom and by the mistakes of other states and cities in this and other countries. It will collect and keep accurate and up-to-date information on all the questions and problems with which our legislators and administrative officials are called on to deal and will also, so far as means and equipment permit, collect and maintain up-to-date files of charters and ordinances of the principal cities of the United States and other countries. This material will be carefully classified and minutely indexed, so as to be quickly available when wanted. Whenever legislative action is contemplated on any subject, this bureau will be in a position to say whether any other state or city has enacted or attempted legislation on that subject, and if so, how they have dealt with the various questions involved. In this way the experiments and experience of other states and other countries will be placed at the service of our legislative and administrative officials, so that nothing new need be tried without full knowledge being quickly obtainable how other states and other countries have grappled with similar problems and with what measure of success.

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The work of this bureau is a natural development of the public service function of the state university. As such public service, it is rendered without fee or charge at any time, except travelling expenses when it is necessary for a representative of the bureau to visit any locality.

Non-Partisan and Confidential

It goes without saying that the work of this bureau will be strictly non-partisan and non-political, and absolutely confidential. Its function is not to convert or convince, nor even to recommend or to offer advice, but merely to give information in a purely non-partisan spirit, so that facts may speak for themselves. Its services are equally open to men on all sides of any question, its sole object being to provide them with the necessary data for intelligent action. So far as it is possible to anticipate the particular questions which are likely to become live issues in the immediate future, the bureau will prepare information in advance so that this may be quickly available when actually wanted. Suggestions are therefore invited from all who are interested in this work, as to the particular questions or special subjects which are considered most urgent at the present moment, or are likely to become so in the immediate future.

Initial Limitations

The bureau is now in its beginnings, and therefore limited in range and usefulness by its means and equipment. As time goes on it will grow in efficiency and completeness. The next session of our legislature is unfortunately so near at hand as to make it impossible for the bureau to promise much help during this session, but it will do what it can. It is now very busy getting its materials together, and classifying and indexing these for ready use.

The bureau will be glad to receive clippings from papers and magazines on important questions of the day, also donations of magazines for the purpose of cutting out articles of value for its subject files. Please address all matters in this connection: *Bureau of Municipal and Legislative Research, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.*



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